



**C2D – Centre for Research on Direct Democracy
ZDA - Zentrum für Demokratie Aarau
University of Zurich**

C2D Working Paper Series

Latvia:
Country Report

Anita UŠACKA

Anita Ušacka

**Latvia:
Country Report**

**C2D Working Paper Series
6/2000**

C2D – Centre for Research on Direct Democracy

Anita, Ušacka

Latvia:
Country Report

C2D Working Paper Series
6/2000

C2D – Centre for Research on Direct Democracy
ISSN 1662-8152

<http://www.c2d.ch>

CONTENT

1. Subject matters of popular votes	1
2. Techniques and procedures for popular votes.....	3
3. Plebiscites and referendums	5
4. Form of Government and referendum.	5
5. Participation and turnout.....	6
6. Influence of political parties, movements and other pressure groups on direct democracy	7
7. Experience	10

1. Subject matters of popular votes

2. Techniques and procedures for popular votes

3. Plebiscites and referendums

4. Form of Government and referendum.

5. Participation and turnout

6. Influence of political parties, movements and other pressure groups on direct democracy

7. Experience

Direct democracy: country-report on Latvia

Anita Ušacka¹

1. Subject matter of popular votes

According to the Latvian Constitution (the Satversme), as well as, the Law On Referendum and on Legislative Proposals there are three types of popular votes in Latvia. In law theory these types are called:

obligatory referendum,
optional referendum and
automatic referendum.

All citizens of Latvia having the right to elect the Parliament (the Saeima) may participate in referendum and proposed laws.

Obligatory referendum

According to Article No. 77 of the Satversme:

“If the Saeima has amended the first, second, third, fourth or seventy-seventh Article of the Satversme such Amendments in order to come into force of law shall be submitted to a national referendum”.

The Satversme was adopted on February 15, 1922, was in force until 1934 and then it was renewed fully in 1993, after the restoration of independence. The first three Articles as well as Article 6 of the Satversme establish the legal fundamentals of Latvia as an independent democratic state:

“Article 1. Latvia is an independent democratic republic.

Article 2. The sovereign power of the State of Latvia is vested in the people of Latvia.

Article 3. The territory of the State of Latvia, within the borders established by international agreements consists of Vidzeme, Latgale, Kurzeme and Zemgale.

Article 4. The Latvian language is the official language in the Republic of Latvia. The national flag of Latvia shall be red with a band of white.”

“Article 6. The Saeima shall be elected in general, equal, direct and secret elections based on proportional representation.”

If the Saeima adopts a law to amend these Articles of the Satversme, a referendum must be held therefore the referendum is called obligatory.

Optional referendum

According Article No. 72 of the Satversme:

¹ Assoc. Prof. Ph. D. (Law), Justice of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Latvia

“The President has the right to withhold the promulgation of a law for a period of two months. The President shall withhold the promulgation of a law if so requested by not less than one-third of the members of the Saeima².

This right may be exercised by the President or by one-third of the members of the Saeima within seven days of the adoption of the law by the Saeima.”

The President can withhold the promulgation according to his own initiative and he/she must do it if not less than one third of members of the Saeima requires it.

Additionally this Article of the Satversme requires: “The law thus withheld shall be put to a national referendum if so requested by not less than one-tenth of the electorate. If no such request is received during the aforementioned two-month period, the law shall then be promulgated after the expiration of such period.”

If such request is not formulated within the period of two months, i.e. signatures of not less than one tenth of the electorate (who had voting rights in the latest elections of the Saeima) are not collected, the law shall be promulgated at the expiry of that period.

However the Saeima can vote on the withheld law a second time and adopt it with a qualified quantity of votes; three-quarters. Article 6 of the Satversme states:

“A national referendum shall not take place, however, if the Saeima again votes on the law and not less than three-quarters of all members of the Saeima vote for the adoption of the law”.

In practice the Saeima has not used this right.

If the initiative is signed by not less than one tenth of the electorate the Central Election Commission shall announce the referendum within three days.

According to Article 74 of the Satversme:

“A law adopted by the Saeima and suspended pursuant to the procedures specified in Article 72 shall be repealed by national referendum if the number of voters is at least half of the number of electors as participated in the previous Saeima election and if the majority has voted for repeal of the law.”

In Latvian legal theory this type of referendum is called the optional veto referendum.

Automatic referendum

Article 78 of the Satversme states that the people have the right to initiate legislation:

“Electors in number comprising not less than one tenth of the electorate have the right to submit a fully-elaborated draft of an amendment to the Satversme or of a law to the President who shall present it to the Saeima. If the Saeima does not adopt it without change as to its content, it shall then be submitted to national referendum.”

² There are 100 members in the Saeima

The proposed constitutional amendment draft or draft law is presented to the President who must then refer it to the Saeima for adoption. If Parliament fails to adopt it then it is presented to the electorate in a referendum.

Article 79 of the Satversme states that “A draft law submitted for national referendum shall be deemed adopted if the number of voters is at least half of the number of electors as participated in the previous Saeima election and if the majority has voted in favor of the draft law.”

Whether referendum will take place or not depends on the decision of Saeima about adopting the proposed by the people amendment or law so in legal theory this type of referendum is called automatic.

The Satversme also establishes which questions a referendum can not be held. According to Article 73:

“The Budget and laws concerning loans, taxes, customs duties, railroad tariffs, military conscription, declaration and commencement of war, peace treaties, declaration of a state of emergency and its termination, mobilisation and demobilisation as well as agreements with other nations may not be submitted to national referendum”.

According the Satversme, Article 48, popular vote also must be held if the President of the State proposes the dissolution of the Saeima: “The President shall be entitled to propose the dissolution of the Saeima. Following this proposal a national referendum shall be held. If in the referendum more than half of the votes are cast in favour of dissolution the Saeima shall be considered dissolved, new elections called and such elections held no later than two months after the date of the dissolution of the Saeima”.

In practice the President has never used this right. This legal norm has not been applied because the President proposing the dissolution of the Saeima takes a risk to his own position. Article 50 of the Satversme states: “If in the referendum more than half of the votes are cast against the dissolution of the Saeima, then the President shall be deemed to be removed from office and the Saeima shall elect a new President to serve for the remaining term of office of the President so removed”.

2. Techniques and procedures for popular votes

As mentioned above the referendum is arranged if:

the Saeima has amended Articles 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 and 77 of the Satversme,

the President of State has initiated the dissolution of the Saeima,

the President of State has suspended the promulgation of the law for the period of two months and the demand of not less than one-tenth part of the total number of electors on transferring the suspended law for referendum was received during these two months,

the Saeima has not adopted without substantial amendments the draft law or the draft amendments to the Satversme submitted by not less than one tenth of total number of electors.

Techniques and procedures of popular votes are established by the Law On Referendum and on Legislative Proposals, adopted on March 31, 1994 and regarding technical procedures - by the Instructions of the Central Election Committee.

Central Election Committee consists of nine members, eight which including the Chairman are elected by the Saeima and one – by the Supreme Court.

According to Article 4 of the Law On Referendum and on Legislative proposals if the Saeima has amended Articles 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 and 77 of the Satversme “The referendum on this law adopted by Saeima shall be arranged not earlier than one month before and not later than two months later than passing the law through Saeima”.

According to the same law if the President of State has initiated the dissolution of the Saeima, he/she shall announce this to the Central Election Commission. The time for arranging such popular vote is: not earlier than one month before and not later than two months later – after the announcement to the Central Election Commission.

The Law On Referendum and on Legislative Proposals establishes that if the President of State has suspended the promulgation of the Law, he/she shall announce the wording of the suspended law and the decision of the suspension in an official newspaper within seven days after passing the law through Saeima. According to the second part of the Article 6 of the Law On Referendum “The Central Election Commission after such announcement shall inform all cities’ and rural districts’ electoral commissions about the commencement of canvassing the signatures for initiation of the referendum and shall deliver them the lists for canvassing the signatures in sufficient amount.” The Central Election Commission also determines the period of 30 days where the lists for signing shall be accessible in places determined by municipalities (one place for 10 000 electors). After the term of 30 days expires, the cities’ and rural districts’ commissions shall send the lists for canvassing the signatures to the Central Election Commission within three days. According the Article 10 of the Law:

“(1) The Central Election Commission shall count up the signatures, ascertain the result, inform the President of the State and publish the result in an official newspaper. The Central Election commission shall promulgate the referendum within three days, if the initiative for referendum is signed by not least than one tenth part of the number of citizens of Latvia, having the voting rights in the last elections of the Saeima.

(2) The referendum on annulment of the suspended law shall be arranged not earlier than one month and not later than two months after the promulgation.”

Regarding law proposals of the people and the referendum if the Saeima has not adopted law proposal by the people the Law establishes:

“Article 22.

Not least than 10 000 citizens of Latvia having the right to vote are authorised to submit to the Central Election Commission fully elaborated draft law or draft amendment to the Satversme, indicating their name, surname and identification code...”

“Article 23.

(1) Ascertaining that not least than 10 000 citizens of Latvia having the right to vote have signed the submitted draft law or draft amendment to the Satversme the Central Election Commission shall announce that the canvassing of signatures for initiation of the law is commenced delivering simultaneously the corresponding draft law or draft amendments to the Satversme to all cities and rural districts election commissions, as well as the lists for canvassing the signatures in the sufficient amount.” The draft law (amendments to the Satversme) must be published in the official newspaper. The procedure for canvassing of the signatures is the same as described above. If draft law (amendments to the Satversme) are signed by not less than one tenth part of the number of persons having right to vote in the last parliamentary elections the President submits it to the Saeima. Saeima can adopt this law (amendments to the Satversme) or do not do it. If the Saeima does not adopt without substantial amendments draft law or draft amendments to the Satversme submitted as described above corresponding draft law (amendments to the Satversme) shall be submitted to a referendum. The Central Election Commission determines the day of a referendum not earlier than one month and not later than two months after rejection of the draft law (amendments to the Satversme) by the Saeima (also if the Saeima adopted with substantial amendments).

Voting is performed always by secret ballot. The proposal submitted to the referendum shall be recorded on the ballot paper as well as the words “for” and “against”.

Citizens abroad shall vote with a Latvian diplomatic and consular representatives or by mail.

3. Plebiscites and referendums

If we understand plebiscite as type of vote, where population of region or town only takes part then Latvian legislation does not establish the possibility to hold local popular votes and also such votes have never taken place in Latvia.

4. Forms of government and referendum

In the history of Latvia, only one referendum (in 1998 on the liberalizing Latvia's Citizenship law) resulted in acceptance by the people (the Amendments in the Law On Citizenship) since the restoration of independence. Before World War II four cases resulted in not consisting a quorum and in two cases the Saeima accepted the people's legislation initiative without referendum (see Experience).

The 1998 referendum was rather a political question (liberalizing the rules of naturalization - see Experience) and the referendum resulted in increasing of the number of persons eligible for Latvian

citizenship in the order of naturalization. After the referendum state policy and actions of state organizations for noncitizens' integration in the society as well as for civil society development were improved.

The Government in 1998 did not have a clear position on this question because, although the amendments to the law were prepared and supported by the Government, the Fatherland Freedom Party (FFP)—the party of the Prime Minister Guntars Krasts—opposed the amendment. FFP asked the President to suspend the publication of amendments for the collection of signatures for submitting the amendments to a referendum. During the period before the referendum FFP was very active campaigning against amendments by using nationalist slogans.

It seems the last referendum to be held this year (in November) will be about the Amendments in the Law On State Pensions and will show a bigger influence to the Government because the question submitted to the referendum is a social question and closely connected with activities of the Government. The Amendments On the Law On State Pensions to go to a referendum were submitted in the Parliament by the Government and accepted by a majority of votes of the coalition parties (see Influence of political parties, movements and other pressure groups on direct democracy). If the result of the referendum will be positive, e.g. the Amendments on the Law on State Pensions will be withdrawn, then it means that the Saeima and state governmental organisations will have to change their social policy regarding pensioners and they will have to find other solution for improving budget situation, and not solve the problems of the state budget on the pensioners' account.

5. Participation and turnout

As described below (see Experience) before World War II in Latvia there were six legislative initiatives by the people (two in 1923: on April and November, one in 1927, in 1929, in 1931 and in 1933). In all cases the necessary amount of signatures for submitting the draft law to the parliament was collected. According to the Satversme "Electors in number comprising not less than one tenth of the electorate have the right to submit a fully-elaborated draft of an amendment to the Satversme or of a law", i.e. signatures equal to not less than 10% of citizens of Latvia having the right to vote in parliamentary elections are necessary. In all six cases of canvassing signatures necessary the amount of the signatures needed were collected, for example: in 1923 - 15% and 10%, in 1927 - 18%, in 1929 - 19%.

Until 1933 the Satversme established that a draft law submitted for national referendum shall be deemed adopted if the number of voters is at least half the number of citizens of Latvia having the right to vote and if the majority has voted in favour of the draft law.

Regarding the six initiatives mentioned above, in four cases (April 1923 and 1927, 1931 and 1933) a referendum was held and in two cases (November 1923 and 1929) the Saeima had adopted proposed draft laws. In the first two referendums only about 21% (1923) and 22% (1927) of those having the right to vote participated, so the proposed laws were not adopted. In 1931 about 30% of citizens

participated. There was not a quorum but the amount of voters had been large so the Saeima adopted this law later. In the 1933 referendum only 414 897 citizens participated. A quorum was 487 411 votes.

In 1933 the Saeima modified Article 79 of the Satversme “ An amendment to the Satversme submitted for national referendum shall be deemed adopted if at least half of the electorate has voted in favour. A draft law submitted for national referendum shall be deemed adopted if the number of voters is at least half of the number of electors as participated in the previous Saeima election and if the majority has voted in favour of the draft law” (compared with half of all electors before).

After the restoration of Latvia's independence there was one referendum in Latvia (1998) and one attempt to collect the signatures for a legislative proposal (1995). This year (September - October 1999) the necessary signatures for transferring the suspended law (the Amendments in the Law On State Pensions) for a referendum were collected and a referendum will be held (see Influence of political parties, movements and other pressure groups on direct democracy).

There was one attempt to collect the signatures for a legislative proposal – proposed the Amendments to the Satversme in 1995 (establishing a popularly elected president, institute a constitutional court, extend the presidential and parliamentary terms etc. – see Experience). Unfortunately the 10 000 signatures from citizens (necessary for submitting draft amendment to the Central Election Commission for announcing of canvassing of signatures for legislative initiative) was not collected.

In 1998 the referendum on the Amendments to Latvia's citizenship law (liberalizing the law) was to be held simultaneously with parliamentary elections, on October 3. Mostly because held simultaneously with the parliamentary elections 69,16% those with the right to vote participated in the referendum (in the Saeima's elections 71,89% of having right to vote participated). 52,54 % voted in favor of the amendments; 44,89 % voted against.

From September 6 till October 5 of this year the signatures for transferring the suspended law (the Amendments in the Law On State Pensions) in a referendum were collected. 184 383 (13,74% of those having the right to vote) citizens had signed for transferring the Amendments in the Law On Pensions to referendum. 134 195 signatures were necessary for transferring the suspended law to referendum. The referendum will be held on November 13. In some regions of the State the percentage of signatures for was much higher: in the city Rezekne – 37,9%, in the city Daugavpils – 33,8%. The suspended Amendments in the Law On Pensions will be repealed if not less than 482 334 citizens of Latvia participate in the referendum and 50% +1 vote for repealing the Amendments.

6. Influence of political parties, movements and other pressure groups on direct democracy

The influence of political parties on direct democracy in Latvia is very high. Other social movements, NGO's and pressure groups separately do not influence the direct democracy very effectively.

If looking at all performances of direct democracy, after the renewal of independence in Latvia, the first two cases were political in the matter of fact: the unsuccessful attempt to collect the signatures for amending the Satversme in 1995 (considering a popularly elected president, institute a constitutional court, extend the presidential and parliamentary terms etc.) and the referendum on the Amendments on Latvia's citizenship law (liberalizing the law) in 1998. And only the last collecting of signatures for transferring the Amendments in the Law On State Pensions this year has had a mainly social basis.

Political parties in all the cases initiated the collection of signatures and actively agitated during the period of signatures' collection as well as before the referendum so their influence was quite great (regarding two first cases see Experience).

Below the role of political parties is described as well as other pressure groups (for example, labor unions) in the last case:

In July, 1999 the Latvian Cabinet of Ministers accepted draft Amendments on the Law On State Pensions for submission to the Saeima. The Cabinet of Ministers proposed to increase gradually the age of retirement until 62 years (within 9 years for women and 4 years for men), to interrupt the payment of the pensions to persons who continuing to work after retirement age (if their pensions are higher than sixty lats –e.g. about 100 \$), to decide a about ratio for pensions taking into account the percent of inflation once a year (instead two times before), to cancel the possibility for women to receive a pension in a smaller amount before retirement age (from 55 years, retirement age for women now is 57,5) as well as other proposals. The purpose of the amendments was to save the social budget that was deficit by 50 millions lats at the end of July as well as to return to the original pensions' system that was changed in the autumn of 1998 before the Saeima's elections. The Government considered that the Amendments of 1998 were populist pre-elections step and the Amendments were the main cause of the deficit in the social budget. The Amendments were supported by coalition parties: Tautas partija (People's Party - PP), Latvijas cels (Latvia's way – LW) and Tevzemei un brīvībai (the Fatherland and Freedom Party – FFP).

The Saeima accepted the draft amendment in the first reading and decided to consider the Amendments in fast-track consideration (i. e. in two readings) despite of disagreement of opposition parties. The Federation of pensioners, the labor unions and the opposition parliament parties have been protesting against the amendments since they were accepted by the Government. There were also pickets at the Cabinet of Ministers and the Saeima. Before looking through the Amendments in the second reading on August 5, 1999 there were more than 30 proposals from the Saeima's commissions and from political parties. Almost all of these proposed to mitigate the Amendments. Only the MP from LW Peteris Apinis proposed to increase the age of retiring more rapidly than proposed by the Government. The Saeima adopted the proposal of the Government as well as the proposal of Peteris Apinis regarding the more rapid increasing of retirement age. Immediately, 35 members of the Saeima from all of three opposition parties submitted to the President a request to suspend the promulgation of amendments for two months in accordance with Article 72 of the Satversme. "The President shall

withhold the promulgation of a law if so requested by not less than one-third of the members of the Saeima". The amendments according the Satversme should be submitted to a referendum, if not less than one-tenth of the electors so desire. The President of Latvia Vaira Vike-Freiberga was on holiday and so on August 11, 1999 the acting President, the Chairman of the Saeima Janis Straume (member of FFU), announced that the amendments were put on hold. The Central Electoral Commission, the local electoral commissions had one month (from September 6 till October 5) to collect signatures to determine whether the amendments would be submitted to a referendum. During this 30-day period a collection of at least 10 percent (or 134 195) of voters' signatures were necessary for holding a referendum. The acting President did not use his right to return the law in the Saeima.

Already before the start of the collection of signatures, there was information that possibly a referendum would not be held because the coalition parties and the opposition parties (mainly it was spoken about Latvian Social democratic labor party - LSDLP) could agree on compromise amendments in the law On State Pensions. According to the Satversme "A national referendum shall not take place, however, if the Saeima again votes on the law and not less than three-quarters of all members of the Saeima vote for the adoption of the law". E.g. 75 votes of Members of the Parliament are necessary, however the coalition has only 61 votes.

The People's Party (the Premier minister Andris Skele comes from this party) appealed to citizens do not signature for a referendum. On August 31, 1999 the Government called against a referendum explaining that the Amendments were necessary for social budget's saving (the following figures were given: the deficit in the social budget is 37 millions lats, the Amendments will save 4,3 millions this year and 44,5 millions lats next year). PP considered that about 15 000 persons received their pensions "unjustly" receiving privileges comparing with other pensioners on the basis of the Amendments on the Law on State Pensions of 1998 and it was necessary to improve the situation.

Step by step other coalition parties changed their positions. LW announced that it was necessary to reach a compromise with the opposition parties and these amendments could be changed after saving social budget, for example to allow to retiring persons both who work and receive a pension. LW also proposed for to retiring persons who continued to work to receive both salary and pension not higher than 60 lats. LW and FFP started working out the "compromise variant" of the Amendments. FFP proposed to increase the age of retirement more slowly.

LSDLP together with the Free Labor Union and the Federation of pensioners actively campaigned for signing for a referendum on the Amendments in the Law on State Pensions with slogan: "Pensioner, do not capitulate!" There are 651,5 thousand retiring persons in Latvia (including 94,5 thousand persons with special needs also called pensioners in Latvia) as well as about 235 thousand of persons in the age 50 – 60 years. The necessary amount of signatures for holding a referendum in Latvia are about 134,2 thousand. All this time the mostly left parliamentary fraction of the Saeima Par cilvēka tiesībām vienota Latvija (For Human rights in united Latvia – FHRUL) agitated for signing for a referendum. This political movement has a very stable electorate in Latvia. The opposition parties

considered that the money for covering the deficit of the social budget could be taken from the other parts of state budget, and it was necessary to improve the collection of taxes.

The member of Latvia's Way Romualds Razuks said the Amendments were adopted in a hurry and it was a political mistake.

According to the dates of the pool (from September 11 till September 21) 39,7% of all citizens having right to vote will participate in the referendum and vote against the Amendments and only 10,8 % will participate and vote for the Amendments (other 26,6% will not participate and 23,3% have not decided). During the collection of signatures the Central election commission did not provide information about the amount of collected signatures. Only on the evening of October 5, 1999 did it become known that the referendum on the Amendments on the Law On State Pensions would be held because 184 596 had signed for the referendum (134 195 signatures were necessary). The official data of the collecting of signatures was published in the official newspaper on October 12, 1999 so the referendum will be held on November 13.

Coalition parties during September worked out new amendments on the Law on State Pensions (considering slowly increasing the age of retirement as well as the possibility to receive both a pension and a salary) and declare the necessity to reach a "compromise" with the opposition and not hold the referendum, nevertheless the opposition parties still do not agree to this day to this "compromise". Some parties also suggested the calculations of the Ministry of Social Welfare submitted in July before looking through the Amendments on the Law in the Saeima were not correct so the Minister of Social Welfare Roberts Jurdzs must leave.

7. Experience

On April 1923 with 146 950 signatures (about 15% of those having the right to vote) the draft law On inalienability of churches and religious houses was submitted. The Saeima in the plenary session declined this draft law. In referendum only 207 005 persons took part (about 21% of having the right to vote) so the Law was not adopted.

On November 1923 the draft law On compensation to former owners of lands and country seats that had been entered in the state property was initiated by 97 219 signatures (10%). On April 1924 the Saeima adopted this law.

On June 1927 with 198 142 signatures (about 18% of citizens having the right to vote) the draft law On cancelling the Amendments in the Law On citizenship (the Amendments recently was adopted by the Saeima) was initiated. The Saeima declined this draft law and it was not accepted as a those referendum because only 244 372 citizens took part in the referendum (22% of having the right to vote).

On August 1929 the draft law On privileges of stewards obtaining the land from the state property fund was initiated by 206 000 signatures (19%). On November 1929 the Saeima adopted this law so a referendum was not held.

On September 1931 the draft law On Doma Church was initiated. The referendum was held but unfortunately there was not a quorum. In referendum 390 160 voters participated, i. e. about 30% of those having right to vote. The Saeima nevertheless took into account the large quantity of votes and adopted the law after the referendum.

On October 1933 the people initiated draft law for sixth time. On the basis of the draft law had lien ideas of social democrats about providing old age, sickness and unemployment. 414 897 persons participated in the referendum but the necessary amount for a quorum was 487 411. 385 258 persons voted “for” the draft law. Despite the large number of votes for the draft law, the Saeima did not adopt this law later because the state was in economical crisis and there was not enough money in the state budget.

In the spring 1995 The Farmer’s Union of Latvia initiative to amend the 1922 Satversme received considerable support. The party began to collect signatures in April. The amendment under discussion would install a popularly elected president, institute a constitutional court, extend the presidential and parliamentary terms from three to four years and allow deputies to be recalled.

The Satversme was adopted in 1922 and renewed by the fifth Saeima in 1993, after the re-declaration of Latvian independence. First adopted over 70 years ago in 1995 the Satversme did not take into account the dramatic changes undergone in Latvia. For example, till 1998 the Satversme lacked a section on citizens' rights. (To fill this void, the "Law on Rights and Obligations of a Citizen and Person" was adopted by Parliament in 1991). A new draft amendment to the Satversme was formulated by the Farmers' Union (FU). This draft provided for a popularly elected president (The Satversme states the President is elected by the Saeima.), it had proposed instituting a constitutional court (such amendment in the Satversme was adopted only in 1996), extending the Saeima's term from three to four years (such an amendment in Satversme was adopted later - in 1997), and guaranteeing provisions for the dismissal of deputies. (Article 14 of the Satversme prohibits MPs from being recalled.) The draft also includes an entire chapter devoted to local governments. FU would have to collect 10,000 signatures in order to present the draft to the Central Electoral Committee. Then within 30 days the Committee must collect signatures from one-tenth of all eligible voters (nearly 130,000). Some other parties represented in the Saeima, including the biggest party Saimnieks, also supported a popularly elected president. A referendum on the question would nevertheless be necessary due to opposition by many groups, including the Fatherland and Freedom Party (FFP), which supported the parliamentary system. Latvijas Cels (Latvia’s way – LW) – the second biggest party – did not support the change either, and would prefer not to consider the popular election of a president, as this arrangement would change the whole spirit of the Satversme. Some other parties also were satisfied with the status quo. They also feared the extension of presidential power. The opposition claimed there was nothing wrong with the Satversme, charging that the FU would not have proposed any amendment if the president were an FU member. That the FU was well represented in Parliament is commonly adduced to explain why that party wanted to extend the parliamentary term. FU was

optimistic, given polls in which 79,3 % of the respondents support the idea of a popularly elected president, nevertheless, the necessary amount of signatures was not collected.

(All initiatives for referendums mentioned above concerns automatic referendum).

8. On June 22, 1998, the Saeima adopted a package of amendments to the Law on Citizenship that would allow 10 000 among Latvia's Russophone population to apply for Latvian citizenship. The unamended law, which was widely regarded as overly restrictive, sparked a row with Russia and even led Russia, in the spring of 1998, to threaten economic penalties. Proposed revisions of the law also split the government into factions and this led to one of the ruling coalition's larger parties—the Democratic Party Saimnieks (DPS)—leaving the government. The amendments proposed to scrap the "windows system" so that all noncitizens over the age of 16 could apply immediately for citizenship provided they pass a Latvian language and history examination. (The original Law on Citizenship of 1995 established time frames during which noncitizens would be able to apply for citizenship. According to the Law, people who were born in Latvia and are between the age of 16 and 30 may submit naturalization applications. In 1999, the age limit would be raised to 40; in 2000, all others born in Latvia would be eligible to apply; in 2001, persons born outside Latvia who arrived in Latvia as children under the age of 16 would be able to apply; in 2002, persons born outside Latvia and having arrived in Latvia under the age of 30 would be able to apply. In 2003, all others may apply.) According to the proposed amendments, children born after August 21, 1991 (the date of independence from the Soviet Union) were eligible for citizenship immediately and without the hurdle of a language examination. Although the amendments passed in their first two readings, on May 20 and June 4, final passage, which required a third reading and vote, was uncertain, since the Fatherland Freedom Party (FFP)—a member of the ruling coalition and the party of Prime Minister Guntars Krasts—opposed the amendment package. FFP argued that the granting of citizenship to children born after 1991 without a Latvian language examination was dangerous, because of the flood of approximately 20,000 children would become Latvian citizens in just a few weeks.

Before the June 22 plenary meeting in which the Saeima looked through the proposed amendments in a final reading, Prime Minister Krasts (FFP) unexpectedly asked the parliament to postpone the final decision on the amendments granting citizenship to stateless children born after August 1991. Krasts argued that the proposed amendment should be broadly debated by the general public. Despite the Prime Minister's change of position, on June 22, the parliament adopted all proposed amendments by a vote of 49 in favor, 26 against, and 7 abstentions. A few days after the Parliament adopted the amendments, 36 deputies submitted a request, at FFP's initiative, to President Guntis Ulmanis to suspend the publication of amendments for two months in accordance with Article 72. The law should be submitted to a referendum, if not less than one-tenth of the electors so desire. On June 30, Ulmanis formally announced that the amendments to the citizenship law were put on hold, pending the outcome of the proposed referendum. The Central Electoral Commission, the local electoral commissions had one month (from July 20 through August 18) to collect signatures to determine whether the

amendments would be submitted to a referendum. During this 30-day period, if at least 10 percent (or 133,435) of the voter signatures were gathered, a referendum must be held. Signatures were also being gathered at Latvia's diplomatic missions abroad. The number of signatures actually collected during the first few days indicates that the population was not mobilized to support the referendum. Several of the ruling parties, including Latvia's Way (LW) and Farmers' Union (FU) and DPS, did not support the referendum. In addition, the newly formed People's Party (PP), led by former Prime Minister Andris Skele, came out against the campaign. Most observers believe that, if held, the referendum would fail but could potentially strengthen the nationalist vote in the general elections that fall. According to one poll from late 1997, 82 percent of Latvians supported giving citizenship to children, but only 28 percent supported other changes in the citizenship law. During the first two weeks of the campaign, it appeared that the necessary number of signatures would not be collected. During the last week, however, the Fatherland Freedom Party (FFP) intensified its campaign and, using nationalist slogans and Latvian celebrities, gathered the requisite number of signatures. FFP urged voters to oppose the amendment that would allow non-Latvian speakers to obtain citizenship; but it did not object to the elimination of the "windows system." Although the amendments to the law were prepared and supported by the government, the Prime Minister Guntars Krasts, and the Justice Minister Dzintars Rasnacs—both FFP members—supported FFP's campaign against liberalizing the law. With the requisite number of signatures collected, the Central Election Commission announced that the referendum would be held simultaneously with parliamentary elections, on October 3. During the electoral campaign, liberalization of the citizenship law was obviously a key issue. Latvia's Way (LW), the People's Party (PP), Democratic Party Saimnieks (DPS), the Social Democratic Union (SDU), the New Party (NP), and the People's Harmony Party (PHP) favored amending the law to relax citizenship requirements. Only two major parties, FFP and the newly established Labor Party-Christian Democrat-Latvia's Green Party coalition supported the repeal of the amendments. On October 3, the Latvian electorate ratified the amendments liberalizing the citizenship law. Just over half of those who turned out, 52,5% voted in favor of the amendments; 44,9% voted against. With the public's endorsement of the amendments Latvia's citizenship law now meets OSCE recommendations regarding the naturalization and citizenship rights of noncitizen children born in Latvia.

9. From September 6 till October 5 this year the signatures for transferring the suspended Amendments in the Law On State Pensions in a referendum were collected. (See Participation and turnout and Influence of political parties, movements and other pressure groups on direct democracy.)

Local popular votes have never taken place in Latvia.